

STARRY FLAG WEEKLY

THRILLING STORIES OF OUR VICTORIOUS ARMY

INTO DEATH'S JAWS

OR UNITING WITH THE RECONCENTRADOS



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BY DOUGLAS WELLS

"WHO WILL HINDER ME?" JEERED THE SOLDIER. LIKE A FLASH THE ANSWER CAME AS HAL ROSE UP. "I WILL!"

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INTO DEATH'S JAWS

OR,

UNITING WITH THE RECONCENTRADOS.

By DOUGLAS WELLS.

First Part.

CHAPTER I.

HAL AT GOMEZ'S CAMP.

"Will they enlist?"

"Nine-tenths of them will. There are few pacificos in Cuba who are not willing and anxious to help strike the final blow."

As the general-in-chief, Maximo Gomez, made this declaration he paused in his walk back and forth along the tent's interior to fix the gaze of his burning eyes upon the young American officer who had put the question.

"Will the men of Cuba fight?" cried Gomez, after a moment's pause. "My young friend, you are familiar with our Cuban armies. You must know that all that keeps outside of our lines the pacificos is the fact that they have not been able to get arms. Let the Government at Washington supply me with ten thousand rifles, and I will find ten thousand Cubans to carry those rifles and use them against Spain. Let fifty thousand rifles come, and I will find fifty thousand volunteers. Let even more rifles come, and I will find

volunteers at least up to nine-tenths of the number of Cuban pacificos in the island who are able to walk and load guns!"

General Gomez did not talk like a man who was swayed by mere enthusiasm.

As generalissimo of the Cuban forces during more than three years he had made few if any mistakes. This was because he always took pains to be well-informed before talking or acting.

"So, as to the matter of arms," resumed Gomez, "my reply is that I will make the best use of all that come. As to ammunition, I shall be glad, of course, to have the United States supply me with as much as possible."

"And the other supplies, general?"

"Ah, it is in the other matters that I shall have to take more time because I am obliged to depend upon the reports of my subordinates. In the matter of medical supplies, for instance. I am not a surgeon, it is my surgeons who must make up that list. They are now hard at work on the problem."

"And your complete answer——" began Lieutenant Hal Maynard, slowly.

BEST NAVAL STORIES FOR BOYS—TRUE BLUE.

"Will be ready to-morrow. In the meantime, Senor Lieutenant, nothing would be gained by haste. Your detachment of cavalymen will appreciate the rest until then."

"I am not impatient, general. Least of all would I be guilty of the impatience that would bungle things. I shall not think of returning until you assure me that your report is complete in all particulars. And now I will leave you, general, for I can see that you have much that you want to consider."

General Gomez paused in his pacing to shake hands warmly with the young American lieutenant.

As Hal passed slowly out of the tent, acknowledging the salute of the sentinel who stood there, Gomez looked out long enough to remark:

"Sentinel, Lieutenant Maynard will pass you freely at all times."

"Yes, my general."

Lieutenant Hal Maynard's recent history was a fascinating one.

Having been accidentally left behind in Havana on the 9th of April, when Consul General Fitzhugh Lee had sailed with, as he supposed, the last of the real American residents of Havana, our hero had two or three times narrowly escaped death at the hands of the Spaniards before he succeeded in getting out of Havana.

In his escape he was assisted by a newly found friend, Juan Ramirez, a young Cuban of about our hero's own age.

Juan was anxious to join the Cuban field forces in the "long grass."

Hal, seeing nothing else to do, and enraged against the Spaniards, had gone into the "long grass" with Juan.

Side by side they had fought spiritedly, soon winning commissions as lieutenants.

While the American fleet waited at Key West, Hal and Juan had been sent

by General Betancourt on a mission from General Gomez to the secret insurgent junta in Havana.

From there the daring youngsters had gone to La Jova, where they met the two pilots assigned by the Havana junta to pilot Admiral Sampson's fleet in Cuban waters.

With the pilots, after some rousing adventures, Hal and Juan had reached Key West.

At Key West Hal and Juan had remained, awaiting the departure of Cuban forces from Florida to the island.

It was while so waiting that the military commandant at Key West had picked up Hal as just the one to go to Cuba to find General Gomez, and from him ascertain just what kind of aid the Cuban commander needed from the United States.

Hal's selection was approved by the Washington authorities. He was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the regular army, given command of a detachment of twenty United States cavalry regulars, and landed with them on the coast of Cuba east of Matanas.

Juan had accompanied them as guide.

Reaching the Cuban headquarters after successfully passing through great peril on the way, our hero had presented the questions which President McKinley wanted General Gomez to answer.

Within his first few hours at headquarters Hal had distinguished himself by detecting two traitors to Cuba who were serving in Gomez's command.

One of these spies had attempted to assassinate the young American lieutenant, coming within an ace of succeeding.

The conversation described at the opening of this chapter took place on the morning following the arrival of our hero at Gomez's headquarters in the field.

As Hal left the general, he stepped

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briskly through the camp to the grove where his own detachment was quartered.

As he passed, many of the Cubans turned to gaze after him with admiring comments.

It was a great sight for their wistful eyes to see at last the uniform of Uncle Sam in their camp.

True, there were as yet but a score of these soldiers, but these were the harbingers of the great army to come to bleeding Cuba's aid.

Hal found his troopers, splendid, stalwart, muscular fellows, stripped to shirt and trousers.

In two long lines the horses were tethered, while the men went over them with brush and curry comb until the animals' coats were as sleek and shiny as satin.

Near by, watching the work of every man with a critical eye, stood Jim Brown, the veteran sergeant of the detachment.

"What is the condition of the horses, sergeant?" asked Hal, as he reached the side of his next in command.

"Excellent, sir. Couldn't be better. The animals stand the climate and roads of Cuba better than I would have believed."

Hal passed between the two lines of horses, stopping for a brief examination of each.

Then, looking at his watch, and finding that the full length of time had been spent on stable duty, he gave the order:

"Cease grooming, sergeant."

This matter of morning routine off his mind, Hal Maynard went in search of his chum, Juan Ramirez, who now held a captain's commission under Gomez.

He had not far to look for the Cuban.

Clink-clank! came the sound under a near-by spreading tree.

There sat Juan, carefully going over

the blade of his long machete with a honing stone.

"Still sharpening that steel, my comrade?" laughed Hal. "It seems to me you make little other use of your leisure."

Juan looked up with an affectionate smile, stopping the honing only as long as his eyes were off the work.

"A machete gets dull, mi amigo, from resting in its scabbard."

"Yet yours flashed out yesterday, and cut down many Spaniards."

"True, mi amigo; therefore it needs sharpening."

"You sharpened it last night."

"True also, but it has grown dull since by resting in the scabbard. A Cuban, mi amigo, must always keep his weapon ready for instant use against the enemy."

"And yours," smiled Hal, taking up the weapon and inspecting its keen edge, "would do for shaving if it were not so heavy."

"Even so," said the young Cuban officer proudly, as he took the blade back into his own hands. See!"

Plucking a hair from his head, Captain Ramirez swiftly cut off several pieces by merely passing the fibre across the steel.

"It is in such condition," he smiled, grimly, "that we keep our knives whetted for Spaniards."

"Poor Spaniards," smiled Maynard. "I've often seen them run in terror from just such machetes, wielded as only the Cubans know how to use the weapon."

"And you have often used the machete yourself, mi amigo, with fearful effect, as I know through the service of my own eyes. There is no young man in Cuba who knows more of the use of the machete than you, mi amigo."

This was true enough, but Hal laughingly protested:

"No bouquet-throwing, my comrade."

"CLIF FARADAY UNDER FIRE"—READ TRUE BLUE.

"Gentlemen, I present the compliments of General Gomez to you both."

Turning, they beheld one of the generalissimo's aides, who had just reached the spot.

"General Gomez requests that you attend him in his tent."

"At once," responded Hal.

"Immediately," quoth Juan, rising, sheathing his machete, and carefully though hurriedly brushing from his uniform the last speck of dirt or dust.

Two minutes later they found themselves in the presence of the great Cuban.

"Senor," pronounced Gomez, slowly, "you have asked me how many of our Cuban pacificos would enlist. I have decided that you shall see for yourself if you wish."

"How, general?"

"By going among them. You shall question them, for there are three villages near here where, relying on my protection, the pacificos have ventured to return to their homes. By questioning these people you shall see how many of them would fight for Cuba, were they given arms. You have even my authority, if you wish it, to enroll the names of all volunteers who agree to serve as soon as given guns. The day's experience will furnish you with a good idea of the report you are to take back to the United States."

"And shall I go too, my general?" spoke up Juan, eagerly.

"Not so," replied Gomez. "You will be needed here to-day, for I have matters in which you can help me."

Juan tried hard to conceal his disappointment.

It was the first time that he and Hal had been separated in any adventure.

And adventure there was to be, though certainly Hal Maynard was as far as General Gomez himself from imagining

the perils that destiny held in store for the young American lieutenant.

CHAPTER II.

"PEDRO, THE SPANIARD!"

"You will hardly need an escort, Senor Maynard," declared the Cuban commander-in-chief.

"I had thought of taking my detachment."

"You will please yourself, of course, senor, but it will really not be necessary."

"Then I won't think of taking the men out. Both they and the horses will be better for a day's rest."

"Nor will you need, senor, to take your own horse, which will soon need its strength for the march back to the coast. Any one of our tough Cuban ponies is at your disposal. You shall have a guide and I will send four of our troopers with you. Since you will be all the while under the shadow of our army, you will not need a greater escort, though I will furnish you with it, should you desire it."

"I am content, general, with what your wisdom suggests," replied Hal, bowing.

"Now, as to my guide," resumed Gomez. "He is one of the stanchest, most intelligent fellows I can put at your disposal, despite the fact that he is a Spaniard."

"A Spaniard?" repeated Hal, in surprise.

"Yes; but he is a Cuban at heart. He loves our cause; he has fought for it. On his body are a dozen ugly scars won in the service of Cuba."

Raising his voice, Gomez called:

"Paulo!"

In the doorway of the tent appeared a young man who halted, saluting.

"This is Senor Maynard, who will be

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in your charge. Serve him with your life, Paulo."

"With my life, cheerfully, general," came the earnest response.

"Tell Captain Silva to furnish you with four of his best men, well mounted. And see that Senor Maynard's horse is worthy of a United States soldier."

"Yes, my general."

"You will learn much to-day, Senor Maynard," resumed Gomez, after Paulo had vanished, "concerning the temper of the Cuban pacificos. That there may be no doubts left in your mind, question them as searchingly as you will."

Paulo was not one who, when on special duty, allowed any mesquite bushes to grow under his feet.

It seemed as if he had hardly left the tent when he reappeared, announcing:

"The horses and troopers are waiting, senor."

"Adios, mi amigo," murmured Juan, a trifle sadly, as he grasped his chum's hand at parting. "It seems odd that for once you should set out alone."

"Pooh!" protested Hal. "This is only a pleasure ride; nevertheless, I am sorry that you cannot share the pleasure with me."

Mounting, the little party trotted through the camp, Hal pausing long enough at the camp of his detachment to give Sergeant Brown some necessary orders.

Then, turning to his guide:

"Paulo," requested Hal, "bring on your villages."

"The first one is not five miles distant, senor. We can go there easily in an hour."

To pass time, Maynard decided to draw out his guide.

"I am told, Paulo, that you are a Spaniard who loves Cuba better than Castile."

"It is true," was the grave answer. "But I love truth and justice better even than Cuba. It is because of that that I have cast my lot with Cuba. The cowardice, treachery and cruelty of Spain have made me renounce the country of my birth."

"There are many other Spaniards like you in the Cuban service?"

"Many, senor. Several former Spanish officers now obey Gomez. They came here filled with ardor and patriotism. They saw the dastard part that Spain plays here, and it did not take them long to desert to the banners of Cuba libre. This, senor," added Paulo, pointing proudly to a scar on one cheek, "is a badge of my disgust for Spain."

"Received in battle against the Spaniards?"

"Even so, like a dozen other scars which my uniform conceals."

"If all Spaniards had been like you there would have been no trouble in Cuba."

"If Spain had been but half honest, half just, senor, the Cubans would have been loyal to what we once called the mother country. While many of us sympathize with Cuba, ninety-nine per cent. of the Spanish would see the brave islanders exterminated. Even my own brother would go to any lengths to serve Spain. He would go to as great lengths as I, on the other hand, would to serve Cuba."

"Your brother is here on the island?"

"It is to, senor. Though I feel disgraced in saying it, I must denounce him as one of the most cruel of Spaniards. He is my brother; the same mother nursed us both, yet while I have several times nearly died for freedom, he has made his name infamous by the deeds he does in the name of Spain. Senor," added the guide, with flashing eyes, "I

could almost hope that I might meet him, face to face, with our weapons in hand!"

"His name?"

"Pedro, the scoundrel!"

"I won't pursue this subject any further," mused Hal. "It isn't pleasant to see brothers hate each other so, even when they have reason to."

After that they trotted along in silence for some minutes.

Hal and Paulo rode side by side, the guards coming in pairs behind.

"There is the first village we are to visit, señor," announced Paulo as the cavalcade trotted out on a plain.

Hal gazed on the charred remnants of some fifty houses.

"Destroyed by the enemy?" he queried.

"Burned the first time that Weyler sent a column through this section. There were over forty men, women and children shot in cold blood. Spain's dastardly colonel, who commanded the column reported it as a victory against the Cubans, and claimed that two hundred of the insurgents had been killed in a four hours' battle. Bah!" growled Paulo. "What lying braggarts and cold-blooded murderers these Spanish colonels are!"

Past the charred remains of the village was a little group of a dozen huts, not one of which was larger than a soldier's hut.

In each of these lived the family of a Cuban pacifico, or non-combatant.

The clatter of horses' hoofs was a signal that brought out all the inhabitants of the settlement.

Women came out bringing babies in their arms followed by other small children. Men and boys flocked from the near-by fields where they were tending the young crops with which they hoped to stave off the last pangs of starvation.

"Cubans," cried Paulo, "this officer comes from General Gomez to learn how many of you will enlist under our general as soon as arms can be put into your hands. How many offer themselves?"

Paulo's last few words were drowned out in clamor.

Had Hal been less accustomed to the impulsiveness of the Cubans he might have fancied that he was in danger of being mobbed.

"What way is that to answer?" demanded Paulo, sternly. "If you all talk at once, how is the American officer to understand you. All who agree to serve under Gomez the moment guns are provided will form in line. Let the first man stand next to my horse."

Three or four men scrambled for the honor of standing first, but the line was speedily formed.

Every one of the dozen men responded. Two boys, not either of whom was over fourteen, brought up the rear end of the line.

"Um," murmured Hal. "At your age, I'm afraid——"

"In the name of Heaven, señor," pleaded one of the youngsters, "do not say that we may not be men like the rest."

"I have nothing to say as to who shall be accepted," replied Hal, dubiously, "but it seems to me that boys barely in their teens——"

"There are already many of the same age in the ranks," interposed Paulo.

"Then," replied Hal, "I will enroll your names, and present them to General Gomez."

A boy of ten thereupon darted into the line.

"Hold on," expostulated Maynard. "We must draw the line somewhere short of the cradle."

"When are we to be armed, senor?" eagerly questioned one of the men.

"Would you be ready if guns were supplied you this evening?" queried Lieutenant Hal.

"Ready in an hour," responded the spokesman.

"Do the rest of you say the same?"

They did, responding by acclamation.

"Now, listen," said Hal. "When you hear that the guns from the United States have arrived, flock to the camp. Every one whose name is on this roll will be accepted if he is found to be able-bodied."

"Adios, my friends," called Paulo, waving his hand to the villagers. "Be quick to respond when the call comes."

"Be sure of us!" was the response.

After the departing horsemen came a ringing shout of:

"Viva Cuba libre!"

"Viva los Estados Unidos!"

"What do you think of them, senor?" questioned Paulo.

"They are ready for the call, certainly. Uncle Sam will make no mistake in sending them arms and ammunition."

"You will find it the same everywhere else."

Three more villages were visited through the day. In all, a total of fifty-four men were seen. From them there were fifty-four offers of enlistment. There were many boys, too, who insisted upon being enrolled. All who appeared to be over fourteen Hal delighted by accepting.

It was dark by the time that the rounds of the four villages had been made.

"Since we have not eaten all day, senor," suggested the guide, "suppose that we halt and eat?"

"A good plan," nodded Hal, with alacrity. "I'm famished."

"And our good fellows, senor, have

some provisions that they will quickly prepare for us."

"It can't be too soon ready," uttered Hal, reining up and dismounting.

A fire was quickly kindled by the troopers, and in a few minutes the savory odor of coffee filled the air.

"That's appetizing," clicked Hal, sniffing with satisfaction. "What are the solid edibles, Paulo?"

"Some coarse bread, senor, and two small slices of meat."

"Not enough," declared Maynard, shaking his head.

"None of us will eat, senor, until we have seen you satisfied," protested Paulo.

"Oh, yes, you will," retorted Hal. "Each one will eat a sixth part of what there is. But I saw some fruit about a half a mile back. I will ride back and get some; with that we will have a famous supper."

Springing into the saddle, Maynard went back over the road lately traveled.

But in the gathering darkness our hero found that he could not readily locate the trees he had seen before.

"I don't like to be stumped," grumbled the young lieutenant. "I will look further."

He did so, even dismounting and leading his horse off the road.

But the fruit eluded his search.

Before Hal realized it, an hour had passed in the vain quest.

"Jupiter!" exclaimed Hal, striking a match and getting a look at his watch. "I'll have to hustle, or Paulo will have a bad case of rattles."

Springing into the saddle, he rode through the woods, bending over his horse's neck to avoid the low-hanging bushes.

Suddenly before him he saw another horseman sitting motionless on his beast.

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Like a flash Hal's pistol was out and trained on the stranger.

"Give a good account, and quickly, my friend, before I shoot," warned Hal.

"Would you shoot me, senor?" demanded a laughing voice.

"Paulo!" ejaculated Hal, riding nearer and scanning the other.

"Who else, senor?"

"So you were worried? You came to seek me?"

"Was it not natural, senor? Have you no idea how long you have been away?"

"Yes. I thank you, Paulo. I hope the troopers have eaten?"

"They were obliged to, senor, for they were called away."

"Called away?"

"Yes; did you not see the rockets?"

"Not a rocket."

"That must have been, senor, because you did not look for them. Our soldiers always do, at night."

"They have been summoned back to camp?" came the quick question from Hal.

"Even so, senor."

"Then there is something unusual afoot?"

"It must be so, for General Gomez does not permit rockets to be wasted."

"Good!" quoth Hal. "I would like to see some of the excitement myself. Come, Paulo, let us ride like the wind."

"Not quite so fast as that," responded the other. "We would tire our beasts to little purpose. But we must move at a good trot. Do you think, senor, that you could find the way back to headquarters if I were not with you?"

"Hardly. I have taken so little notice of the way that I confess myself all turned about."

"We are fully fifteen miles from headquarters. But follow me."

Without more ado the guide turned his horse's head about and trotted off.

Hal followed him. Mile after mile was traversed, going most of the way at a trot.

The guide seldom spoke.

"He's keeping his mind on the way," conjectured Hal. Then added aloud:

"My friend, you said fifteen miles. I feel as if I had traveled twenty."

"We will halt here, senor," called back the guide, directing his steed into a grove.

"Why here?" demanded Hal. "Why not keep on to headquarters?"

The guide did not reply.

Stung by a sudden suspicion, Hal rode close up beside the fellow, scanning his face.

"Confusion!" roared the young lieutenant. "Paulo had a scar on his cheek. You have none. You are not Paulo."

"And if so, senor—what then?" came the mocking response.

"By all that's treacherous," gasped the boy, you are——"

"Pedro, the Spaniard!"

Out of the black depths of the forest came a chorus of jeering laughter.

CHAPTER III.

"BUZZARD'S MEAT!"

"Dismount, senor!"

Pedro uttered the command, carelessly, as if he could not conceive the possibility of a refusal.

He had never made a greater mistake.

"Why should I dismount?" demanded Hal.

"You are surrounded, and must——"

"Surrender?"

"Exactly."

Crack!

With an incredilby swift movement

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Hal Maynard drew one of his pistols, sighted as if by instinct, and fired.

Out of the saddle toppled Pedro, drilled through the forehead by a bull's eye shot.

Out came the other pistol. Digging knees and heels into the flanks of his steed, Lieutenant Hal Maynard rode forward at a gallop.

Crack! crack! crack!

Catching sight of dark forms ahead of him, Hal pulled both triggers together.

Only three men stood directly in his path. These toppled as Pedro had done.

One of them, before falling, succeeded in firing a shot at our hero.

It missed by a foot, however.

"Clear road ahead!" thrilled Maynard.

Clear of enemies was what he meant. Urging his beast onward, he trusted to it to pick its own way among the trees.

But now a tumultuous volley came from behind.

The Spaniards who survived, recovering from their astonishment, were in hot pursuit.

Wild enough went the first bullets.

"Nice people, these Spaniards," muttered Hal, sardonically. "Only one thing about them—they don't know how to shoot."

Both his own revolvers were empty.

He was in the act of re-loading them, when his horse, brought low by a pursuing bullet, stumbled and fell.

"Gracious!" muttered the dismayed American for the catastrophe had occurred so suddenly that he narrowly escaped being pinned down under the body of the brute.

Escaping this disaster, he leaped to his feet, darting off through the darkness.

Hal fled onward at right angles with the course he had been riding.

Up rode the Spaniards. Counting them as well as he could in the dark, from his

post of observation behind a tree, Hal judged their number to be twenty.

"Too many for me to have any show," he gritted.

Quickly slipping cartridges into his pistols, he stood watching and waiting.

He heard the enemy charge by in the night, heard the beat of their animals' hoofs grow fainter and fainter as the distance increased, and then, at last, heard nothing but the soft murmur of the night breeze through the trees.

"One experience like that is enough," grimaced the young lieutenant. "Next time I might run up against better shots. Whew! How much Pedro looked like his honest brother!"

But what had become of Paulo and the four troopers? Could it be that they were still waiting for him?

From what he knew of the devotion of Cubans to duty, he felt that his question must be answered in the affirmative.

"A long wait they'll have," sighed the boy. "I must be thirty miles away from headquarters. Fagged as I am now, with no horse to bear me, it looks like a three day's trip."

Feeling utterly disconsolate, Hal sat down to think.

In which direction was General Gomez's headquarters?

Maynard was well enough acquainted with the stars to be able to guide his course by them. The trouble was that, during the day, relying upon the excellent Paulo, he had not taken the trouble to notice the course.

"The Spaniards must still be running," grinned Hal, as his thoughts reverted to the foes whom he had so cleverly eluded. "Probably they think I'm still running. So far as they're concerned, this will be the safest place for me to dally."

Confident that he was too wide awake

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to be in any danger of falling asleep, our hero stretched his legs luxuriously on the ground, resting his back against the tree trunk.

Fatal confidence! Overcome by fatigue, Maynard slept. It was daylight when he awoke.

"Blazes!" he muttered, leaping to his feet. "What a dolt—what an ass—what a sleepy-head I've been! I'm such a lunk-head that, for all I would have known to the contrary, I might have been captured and taken into Matanzas during the night!"

He stared all around him. In every direction, as far as he could see, the forest extended.

"Will somebody please find me?" grunted the young lieutenant.

With a snort of disgust, he got his bearings then struck out to the eastward.

"Gomez ought to be somewhere in this direction, if he hasn't moved," soliloquized the lost one.

He walked onward for half an hour, still finding himself in the deep forest.

Gradually, however, the trees became smaller, and further apart.

"It looks as if I were coming to a clearing," realized Lieutenant Hal, with a thrill of delight.

And a clearing it was, as he discovered at length.

"Ugh!" muttered the boy, looking up suddenly with a start of abhorrence at a ghastly object swinging from a tree.

It was the body of a man, wasted and miserably clad.

"Some poor pacifico," choked the sympathetic American. "Probably his only offense was that he was too much of a man to yell 'Viva Espana' (long live Spain) as loudly as his captors wanted him to. Very likely he hadn't committed even that much of an offense."

Fully three yards clear of the ground

swung the feet. From the neck itself to the limp above were only some two feet of rope.

"The fiends went to a great deal of trouble," muttered Hal, savagely.

Tightening his belt, the American clasped the trunk, and began to climb.

A few moments later he climbed out upon the bough to which the rope had been made fast.

Reaching the rope, Hal swung himself downward, holding on by only one hand.

With his other hand he touched the strange face.

"Dead," shuddered the boy. "He has been dead for hours—past all attempts at reviving him."

Whish! whish! The rapid flight of wings o'erhead drew the boy's gaze upward.

"Buzzards!" he gasped. "Oh, Spain has been kind to these ill-omened birds for centuries!"

Swinging himself up again on the limb, Hal debated whether to cut down the hapless pacifico and bury him properly.

"Better not," was his final decision. "Even what the buzzards leave of the poor wretch may serve as some clue to anguished seekers."

From his perch he had a very good view of the country just ahead.

There were some thirty charred buildings, burned almost to the ground by Spanish soldiers at sometime in the past.

Only a few of the most insignificant huts had been left standing.

"No one living there," murmured Hal. "Hold on, though. There's a child running into that cabin over yonder."

Stopping inwardly to debate for only a moment, Hal slid down the tree trunk, striking out for the village with vigorous steps.

He threaded his way confidently be-

tween the buildings belonging to the past and those of the present, though he did not neglect to slip his two holsters around closer to the front.

Halting before the cabin he had seen the child enter, Hal looked inside.

"Any one at home?" he called in Spanish.

There was no answer.

Stepping up to the door, Hal knocked sharply.

"My friends, if there is any one at home, do not be afraid to come out."

Still no answer.

"I am not a Spaniard," added the young lieutenant, by way of extra assurance.

Even this brought no response.

"Well, when no one is at home, and the door is open," mused Hal, aloud, "there can be no harm in entering."

He stepped boldly in, now, looking sharply about him in the semi-gloom.

From the further end of the single room the cabin contained, several pairs of unnaturally bright eyes regarded him.

As Hal wheeled about on them, sharp screams came from three young children.

"Don't be afraid of me," hailed Hal, reassuringly. "I am only a stranger who has lost his way, and comes here to inquire."

Slowly, as if still suspicious, a woman of perhaps thirty-five came slowly forward, looking him all over with her piercing black eyes.

She was thin and emaciated-looking, this poor creature, barefooted, and wearing a single outer garment of the most nondescript kind.

"You are a soldier," she faltered, "and not a Cuban. Neither is your uniform that of Spain."

"Quite right, my dear madam. It is the uniform of Uncle Sam, who lives to the north of Poor Cuba."

At this announcement, a girl of eighteen left the little group at the other end of the cabin.

Gliding forward, she looked Hal over, the greatest curiosity being manifest in her soft brown eyes.

She, like her mother, showed the signs of the most horrible starvation, the most abject poverty.

"You need not fear me," went on Hal, reassuringly. "You are in the presence of a friend. I am an American officer, trying to find the camp of General Gomez. Can you direct me?"

"I knew where it was yesterday," faltered the older woman. "But who can say if it is in the same place to-day? Maximo Gomez moves like the hurricane. Yet his camp yesterday was pitched at a point some thirty miles from here. You could hardly find the way unaided. Since you are an American, we trust you. My daughter Iza will guide you."

"Mother," whispered the girl, suddenly, her voice quivering with alarm, "I have just peeped through the crack in the back of the cabin. They are coming."

"Spanish soldiers?" thrilled Hal.

"Worse! The Spanish volunteers. Senor Americano, you must hide. Quick! Follow me!"

Going after his young guide, Hal stepped through the doorway.

Outside stood an empty sugar hogshead.

Iza pointed silently to this. Nodding, Hal sprang inside, disappearing from sight.

CHAPTER IV.

THE VOLUNTEER WHO ATE DIRT.

Moving swiftly as thought, Iza threw a few handfuls of straw over Maynard's head—enough to hide him from casual view.

A NAVAL CADET UNDER FIRE—SEE TRUE BLUE.

This done Iza stole back into the cabin. After a few moments Hal heard the tramp of men.

Volunteers? He knew them well—the most infamous military body ever organized by a supposedly civilized nation.

The Spanish volunteers in Cuba are Spanish subjects who enlist in that body to escape many exactions which are enforced against others.

They cannot be tried in the civil courts; the military tribunals of Spain have often acquitted them on the most infamous and clearly-proven charges.

So long as the volunteers persecuted only Cubans they were practically exempt from punishment. When they plundered or abused, if Cubans were the only sufferers, Spanish justice was not only blind but deaf and dumb.

At all times through the insurrection the volunteers have out-Spaniarded Spain's regular soldiers.

Such were the men who now approached the cabin.

"Here are rebels young and old!" jeered a brutal voice as a half a dozen fellows tramped around to the front of the cabin.

Hal stealthily drawing his revolvers gripped them ready for action.

"Only scare-crows," laughed another which brought out a mocking chorus of merriment. "Weyler did his work well with these rebels. We shall find nothing in their cabin."

"Nothing but kisses," laughed one fat Spaniard, as two of the rascals tramped inside.

"A kiss from scare-crows such as these," jeered another. "Bah!"

It took only a few seconds to search the cabin. There was nothing there but the floor.

"These rebels are disgustingly poor," bawled one of the raiders, coming out.

"Why can't they have the sense to die? Now listen, my woman; we shall be coming by this way again in a day or two. See to it that you have food enough to fill our bellies, or we shall have to treat you the way we do all the male rebels we find."

He made a brutal gesture about his throat, at which his comrades laughed.

"Come away," he added.

Off they tramped, all but the fat volunteer.

He remained behind, glaring at Iza in a way that made the poor girl shudder as if assailed by ague.

"When you had more to eat," he said, insolently, "you must have been a pretty girl."

Iza looked at the fellow with loathing, then, trembling worse than ever, turned to dart inside.

But the volunteer caught the girl by one of her slim wrists, growling:

"Per Bacco, you are not so homely now. Your lips have still some color in them. You must give me a kiss."

Iza shuddered, uttered a low scream, tried to wrench herself free.

"Per Bacco well you know that coyness makes a maiden more tempting," jeered the volunteer, drawing her irresistibly toward him.

"Mother!" screamed the girl.

Like a tigress the older woman flew at the miscreant.

"Coward! miserable!" she hissed.

"So?" sneered the soldier.

He turned upon her, but the enraged mother was not to be daunted.

She stood her ground, prepared to use her nails upon that gross, coarse face.

"So you are rebels to the very marrow?" growled the volunteer. "My comrades did wrong to leave you here. I shall take you along!"

Letting go the girl's wrist, reaching

"REMEMBER THE MAINE!"—READ TRUE BLUE, THE NEW NAVAL WEEKLY.

suddenly out with both hands, the rascal seized both women by their flowing hair. He held on tightly, despite their shrieks, gloating over the manifest terror in their faces.

"Come along, you jades!"

"Resist him, Iza," screamed the mother. "He can never take us."

"Who will hinder me?" jeered the soldier.

Like a flash the answer came, as Hal rose up.

"I will, you big Spanish loafer!"

Hal's face was white and set, but he held his pistols with steady hands.

Not a particle did those shining tubes waver as he held their muzzles relentlessly trained on the miscreant.

Coward as he was, the Spaniard trembled.

"Diablo! Who are you?" he faltered. Swift and stern came Hal's answer:

"One who is not coward enough to make war upon women."

"What do you want of me?"

"Down upon your knees, you dog!"

"Come, come, now," remonstrated the fellow with an effort at courage. "Don't dare to try that upon a volunteer of Spain."

"Down upon your knees," thundered Hal, "or you will be buzzard's meat in another second."

There could be no doubting his sincerity.

Trembling in all his fat carcass, the Spaniard flopped.

"Now, kiss the feet of these poor women whom you insulted," insisted Hal Maynard, training his pistols on the volunteer's head.

But Iza shrank back as the volunteer would have complied.

"No, no, no!" she protested, turning to Hal, with a gesture of loathing. "It

would be a profanation for him to touch us—the carrion!"

"You are right," admitted Hal. "Ladies, I beg your pardon. Now, then, fellow, you shall do penance of another kind. You have profaned the very soil here. Therefore, to take the pollution out of the neighborhood, you shall eat as much of the dirt as you can and take it away with you. Begin!"

Toward Hal the fellow shot a beseeching glance.

But our hero was as hard as adamant.

"Eat!" he insisted. "To hesitate is to die!"

Gingerly enough, the scoundrel picked up a few grains of earth and passed them inside his mouth.

"Now that you have got a taste," jeered the boy, "take a bigger handful and swallow it. The first time you put too little in your mouth, I warn you that I shall blow your substitute for brains out!"

With a groan the Spanish volunteer took up a larger handful of earth, transferred it to his mouth, and made a seeming effort to swallow it.

Without a sign of pity in their faces, Iza and her mother stood by watching. In the doorway gathered the three young children.

All the while making a sad pretense of eating the gravel, the Spaniard let his eyes rove about him.

Suddenly, as his glance went past Hal, those eyes lighted with delight.

Whack! Hal received a savage blow in the head, pitching forward.

Five men piled over him, while the dirt-eating wretch capered about with wild gesticulations of joy.

"It is the gringo's turn," he roared. "He shall eat all the dirt in the province, and afterward—! Per Bacco, afterward——"

Second Part.

CHAPTER V.

"TRIED" BY SPAIN'S VOLUNTEERS.

As Hal fell, one of his pistols dropped from his clutch.

Half dazed by the force of the blow, he tried to rise and fight.

But to grapple, in his condition, with a half a dozen men, was more than he could do.

Slam! went the door of the cabin.

Iza had pounced upon the pistol he had dropped.

Grasping it tightly, she rushed into the house, pushing her mother before her.

"Let go of the Yankee, you cowards!" warned the girl.

Through a hole near the top of the door protruded the muzzle of the pistol.

"Per Bacco!" cried the bully whom Hal had forced to eat dirt. "The girl is a fiend. Look out, comrades, she will shoot!"

"The truth, for once," uttered Iza.

Click! went the lock of the pistol. Unable to work the double mechanism with her slim fingers, she had cocked the pistol. A hair's pressure would now be sufficient to fire it.

"Let the Yankee go," she ordered, sternly, "or one of you will be food for the buzzards!"

"Let him go, then. Let us hasten away," urged the fat volunteer.

But his comrades, having at least a grain more of courage, demurred.

"If the witch dares to fire," growled one of the others, "we will burn the hut over their heads."

"You will anyway, if you dare," taunted Iza. "I am not afraid of you."

Hal, all this time, had been struggling in silent desperation.

By a fearful blow on one of his wrists

his enemies had succeeded in forcing him to give up the pistol.

Snap! A pair of handcuffs, sprung over both wrists, placed him out of the fight.

"Let me have him," proposed one of the volunteers.

For a Spaniard, he was a sturdily built fellow. It was somewhat on account of his strength that he had been made a lieutenant.

Bending over our hero, he picked him up, carrying the American on his back.

Iza deliberated whether to fire upon the fellow. Her fear of hitting Maynard deterred her.

"Get in line ahead of me," directed the volunteer lieutenant.

Never was order obeyed more quickly.

Iza, by no means a good shot, now saw the retreat of the Spanish volunteers covered by Hal's body.

She would have sooner died than hit this brave American.

Afraid to chance a shot that might do injury to her late defender, Iza gnashed her teeth at her helplessness.

"To the woods," directed the lieutenant, and promptly the line veered in that direction.

In a jiffy Iza had the door unbarred.

Hal, from his uncomfortable posture on the other's shoulder, saw her glide out of the hut.

Her fair young face, stern and set, betrayed her purpose.

She was bent on rushing after him, resolved on firing upon his captors.

"Go back, I beg of you, Senorita Iza," he called.

"Not until I have made those dogs set you at liberty, Senor Americano," came the firm answer.

"Go back and bar the door. These scoundrels will kill you."

"It is what they propose to do with you. I must rescue you!"

"A NAVAL CADET'S TORPEDO BOAT COMMAND" SEE TRUE BLUE.

"It is a soldier's business to die, but you will make it more bitter for me if you risk yourself. Go back, I beg of you."

"Curse the witch! We will show her what it means to fool with Spain's soldiers!" growled one of the volunteers.

Stepping out of the line, he dropped upon one knee, bringing his rifle to his shoulder.

Bang!

Crack!

Rifle and revolver spoke almost at once. Iza stood unarmed, but from the volunteer came a roar of pain.

Iza's shot had been aimed so low that her bullet struck him in the foot upon which he rested.

His next shot might have brought down the brave girl, but, though he had a repeating rifle, he did not dare use it.

"Stop!" he cried, hoarsely, hobbling back into the demoralized line.

"Let us all fire a volley at the girl," proposed another volunteer. "Between us, we cannot miss her."

"No," negatived the lieutenant, still trudging on with Hal on his back. "All take aim at this Yankee brat. Should she fire again, or attempt to follow further, fire at the pig the instant I drop him to the ground."

This advice was hailed with murmurs of delight. It was instantly acted upon, several rifles being almost poked into the boy's face.

Iza uttered a sob. Admitting herself vanquished, she turned and walked slowly toward the hut.

Straight into the woods Hal's captors bore him, the volunteer who had been struck by Iza's bullet cursing at every step of the way.

"Tie the gringo to the tree for safe keeping," ordered the lieutenant, resting our hero upon his feet.

"Tie him to the tree with his feet two yards from the ground!" jeered one of the fellows.

"Not yet," negatived the lieutenant. "He has not been tried yet, this accursed Yankee pig. We will treat ourselves to the fun of a court-martial."

This idea was hailed with delight.

Hal, looking into the evil, grinning faces of his captors, realized that they meant to have a cat-and-mouse time with him.

"Indians could not be more brutal or devilishly ingenious than this mob of reprobates will prove," conjectured Hal, not without a shudder. "For the honor of my uniform I must keep up my courage. They shall never brag that they made this gringo back down."

"Before he is tried," spoke up the fat volunteer, "I have a proposition to make."

"Speak up," urged the lieutenant.

"You all saw the infamous way in which the pig used me?"

"Yes, yes."

"He made me eat dirt," growled the fat one, in an aggrieved voice. "I, a gentleman and volunteer of Spain, actually eat dirt!"

"The insolent gringo!" cried several.

"If he ate the whole island of Cuba," protested the fat volunteer, "it would hardly wipe out the insult which he inflicted upon a gentleman."

"Feed him yourself with all the dirt you will, mi amigo," advised the lieutenant.

With a cry of glee, the fat volunteer pulled off his jacket, squatting down upon the ground.

Several times he spat upon the same bit of earth, molding this mud into a ball with his hands.

"Now we shall see the pig have his breakfast," announced the maker of the

"Clif Faraday Under Fire." Read True Blue.

mud ball, rising and approaching the spot where Hal stood tied to the tree.

"He shall eat a dozen more like it," jeered the lieutenant. "Oh, he shall be well fed!"

"Open your mouth, beast," ordered the fat volunteer, holding up his mud ball.

But Hal, grinding his teeth, tightly compressed his lips.

"Open your mouth, I tell you," screamed the wretch.

"If you do not obey our comrade," quoth the lieutenant, "I will blow the top off your accursed head."

He held the muzzle of his rifle within six inches of one of Hal's temples.

But Maynard faced him defiantly, still compressing his lips.

"Open your lips," again ordered the lieutenant, shifting the rifle's muzzle to within two inches of the boy's flesh.

He might as well have commanded a statue to open its lips.

It was a contest of will in which the Spanish lieutenant should have known himself to be defeated.

Hal hoped to thus provoke him into inflicting the death wound at once, for this fate our hero believed to be preferable to the one otherwise in store for him.

There were tears of anger in the fat volunteer's eyes as he wailed:

"Can't it be done? Can't I force this pig to take the same diet he forced upon me? He made me eat it, but, alas! he is so stubborn that there is no chance for fair play!"

Suddenly the lieutenant let his gun drop.

"Josefo," he grunted, "you are as stupid as you are fat. There is one way that has not occurred to you."

"If it is a sure way to make this gringo eat dirt, name it, my lieutenant, and I will remain your debtor for life!"

"You have a good knife at your belt, Josefo. Take it, and pry open his lips with its sharp edge."

"Per Bacco, that is splendid advice, my lieutenant!"

Josefo's steel flashed in a second.

Ruthlessly he thrust the steel between Hals' lips, cutting them so as to draw the blood.

In a jiffy, Hal's lips parted.

"Car-r-r-rajo, he will eat!" roared Josefo, delighted.

Instantly he poised the mud ball, ready to toss it into our hero's mouth.

But Hal's mouth went shut again, though not so firmly but that Josefo now tried to pry the lips with one of his pudgy fingers.

It was the move for which crafty Hal had planned.

Darting his head forward, he took firm grip with both rows of teeth on the fat volunteer's finger.

"Oh! ah! oh!" bellowed Josefo, dancing about with the pain and vainly trying to extricate his lacerated digit from the vice that now held it.

Hal held on relentlessly.

"In the name of Heaven," sobbed the fat volunteer, "make the fiend let go!"

The lieutenant and another scoundrel promptly sprang to Josefo's aid.

By pressing their thumbs firmly under the boy's jaws, they soon caused such pain that Maynard had to let go.

"If you've any more breakfasts," taunted Hal, as Josefo tearfully wrapped up the bleeding finger, "brig them on."

"There is no need for a court-martial now," declared the lieutenant, glaring at Hal. "This pig has decided his fate for himself. Untie him from the tree, and let him see what we did yesterday afternoon."

In a twinkling they were leading the boy through the woods. They halted

ARE YOU A PATRIOTIC BOY? READ TRUE BLUE.

close to the tree from which swung the lifeless body our hero had discovered that morning.

"We hung him yesterday afternoon," announced the lieutenant. "He was a Cuban rebel."

"Not in the Cuban uniform," snapped Hal.

"Oh, no; perhaps not."

"He was a pacifico, you cowards."

"Well, what of that?" challenged the lieutenant. "He was a Cuban, and all Cubans are rebels. We did well to hang him."

"It was a murder," insisted Hal, stoutly.

"Name it to please yourself, gringo. The same fat will be yours."

In spite of himself, Hal paled.

"In a few minutes," went on the tormentor, "you will be swinging a piece of lifeless carrion like that yonder."

Hal felt a thrill of terror. In battle, he knew little fear, but to meet the worst fate in this helpless way, without a chance to strike back—that struck a chill to his heart.

"The rope," commanded the lieutenant.

One of the volunteers unrolled the coil from about his waist.

"That is as good a limb as any," decided the lieutenant, after staring about him.

The man with the rope climbed the tree, stretching out on the limb designated, and lowering the noose.

"Have you anything to say?" demanded the lieutenant, turning upon the condemned prisoner.

"Nothing," replied Hal, "except to assure you of my deserved contempt for you as a pack of cowards who could not fight a foe in the open."

"You have said too much," scowled the lieutenant. "Lower the noose."

Down it came, and was quickly adjusted about Hal's throat.

"Up with him."

With the aid of the man overhead, two of the volunteers succeeded in raising Maynard to a standing position upon their shoulders.

This accomplished, the man lying out along the limb made the noose fast.

"All ready?"

"All ready, my lieutenant."

"Step out from under the pig!"

Deprived of the support of those two shoulders, Lieutenant Hal Maynard swung at the rope's end.

Twisting, gasping, shuddering, he began to experience the first awful sensations of death by strangulation.

CHAPTER VI.

ROUGH, TRUE JUSTICE.

"May the same fate attend all Yankees!"

As the lieutenant of volunteers uttered this sentiment, he bared his head, looking toward the sky as if invoking Heaven's approval.

Back and forth in the morning breeze swayed Hal's stiffening body.

He was still suffering indescribable agony, but his head swam, his brain reeled.

Heaven is too merciful to allow a man enduring such a death to fully realize the torture!

And each instant the realization grows less.

Had the Spaniards who now stood about watching Hal Maynard's death throes been counting up the fruits of a hard-earned victory they could not have exhibited greater delight.

"He will make charming carrion," growled Josefo, still nursing his injured finger.

A NAVAL CADET UNDER FIRE—SEE TRUE BLUE.

"The buzzards are decidedly our debtors for such a feast of pork," laughed the lieutenant.

Crack!

Swift as thought the rope parted, letting Hal's body drop to the ground.

Startled beyond description at this unlooked for interference, the Spaniards were some seconds in realizing that a rifle shot had saved the boy's life.

"Who——"

"What——"

Their startled queries went no further.

Turning in several ways at once, like a flock of frightened sheep, they saw the meaning of the shot.

Were the woods alive with troopers? It seemed so.

A complete cordon of horsemen was closing in upon them.

Every instant the circle grew smaller.

Yelling like Indians, the troopers rode down upon the astounded, dismayed scoundrels.

Two or three of the Spaniards grabbed up their rifles.

They let them go in a hurry, however, when they saw all the cavalry carbines that were trained upon them.

"Surrender, you varmints!" rang the sturdy accents of honest old Sergeant Jim Brown.

Though not one of them understood English, the meaning of that command was not lost upon them.

Falling to their knees, throwing their hands up, these Spanish volunteers awaited the next swift events with lively terror.

"Make 'em secure prisoners," ordered the sergeant. "Don't give up the drop on 'em until you get them away from their guns. The Spanish are tricky as poison. Boys, remember the Maine!"

That last adjuration came near costing the volunteers their lives on the spot, for

never has any other cry stirred American warriors to such thirst for vengeance.

But to the honor of the flag be it said that not a shot was fired in anger at these now helpless wretches.

Swiftly enough, however, the Spaniards were moved away from their abandoned weapons and made prisoners.

Sergeant Brown, the instant he had given his orders, leaped from his horse and bent over the unconscious form of the young lieutenant.

"God help the greasers if they've killed our young officer!" he groaned, inwardly.

There were tears in the honest sergeant's eyes; his hand shook as he fumbled for his flask of brandy.

Despite his tremors, however, it was a very few seconds ere Brown had the top off the flask, and sent some of the liquor trickling down Hal's throat.

After another dose of the stimulant, and a few moments of chafing, Hal opened his eyes.

"Still alive, sir!" was Brown's joyous greeting.

Hal nodded, but did not speak, his mind being still too clouded for him to realize what had happened.

"We've got the varmints that tried to do it, sir," chuckled Brown, "and a sorry enough looking lot they are at that!"

Now it all came back to Hal with a flood of recollection.

His first thought was of Iza and her mother.

"There are two women over in one of the cabins yonder," gasped the young lieutenant. "Send over to see if they are safe."

No sooner did he receive the order than Sergeant Brown sent two of the troopers on the gallop.

"REMEMBER THE MAINE!" READ TRUE BLUE, THE NEW NAVAL WEEKLY

"Feel able to stand, sir?" queried the sergeant.

"I think so," nodded Hal.

"Lean on me and try it, sir."

Hal did so, soon finding himself able to stand alone.

"Now I reckon, sir," grinned Brown, "that you're just a-wondering, sir, how we came to be on the ground at the right moment. Well, sir, after you'd been away from Paulo and them other Cubans for quite a spell, sir, they became worried. They sent all up and down the road looking for you. When they failed to find you—though they didn't give up looking for more'n an hour—they lit out on the return for camp as fast as they could make their horses fly.

"General Gomez, as soon as he heard the news, was for sending out several big parties in different directions. But, Lord bless you, sir, I went to Gomez, and I says to him, says I: 'General G., just you trust an old Indian trailer like Jim Brown to find our young officer without any other help than the United States is prepared to furnish. Just you let that there Paulo take us to where he last saw our lieutenant. We'll do the rest, General G.,' says I.

"Now I'm a-telling you, lieutenant, that General G. is a man with a heap of hard sense. He'd heard about our way of trailing Indians, and he knew it was all right. So he says to me, says he: 'Jim'—though I think he called me Jimminy in his queer Spanish lingo—'Jimminy,' says he, 'you just take your boys and go out and find your young officer in your own way. But if you find you need any help,' says he, 'just remember the address of General G.'

"So I just made Paulo and the Cuban troopers that had been with you punch the breeze ahead of us until they found the place where you'd left 'em. It was

pretty near daylight by that time, so, after sending back Paulo and the other Cubans—for their critters was pretty near tuckered out—the boys and me just camped down on that spot until daylight came.

"Once we had the light, it didn't take us no time at all, sir, to find your critter's trail. When we came to where your dead horse lay, we thought at first that you'd been captured by some Spaniards, but one of the boys found your own individual foot trail, and we followed that right here. We came along pretty quiet, sir, just as if we were on the trail of hostile Sioux, and so it was we saw what was going on here without giving the alarm. I made the boys spread out in a cordon, and just as we were ready to charge, I saw you a-swinging, sir. It didn't take me more'n a second to shoot that rope in two. And—but I reckon, sir, you know the rest."

Then, in turn, Hal gave an account of what had happened to him.

Just as he was finishing, the two troopers who had been sent to the cabin, returned, followed eagerly by Iza and her mother.

They almost fell upon Hal's neck in their demonstration of joy.

Suddenly Iza caught sight of that other ghastly body, swinging to the breeze since the afternoon before.

Her eyes dilated, the last drop of blood receding from her face. She seemed frozen with terror.

"Oh, mi padre!" (my father) she moaned, at last sinking to the ground.

Then Iza's mother caught sight of the figure of her husband. She fell to the ground in a dead faint.

"Who did it?" wondered Sergeant Brown.

"These rascals whom you have as pris-

CLIF FARADAY IN ACTION—READ TRUE BLUE.

oners," groaned Hal, as he rushed to the aid of the two anguished women.

"Begging your pardon, sir," rumbled Brown, following Maynard, "are you sure of that?"

"The scoundrels boasted to me of their deed," replied Hal.

"Oh, you dastards!" roared the sergeant, striding over to where the six prisoners cowered on the ground between their guards.

But Brown could not endure to stand looking at them. He went swiftly back to where Hal and Iza had just succeeded in bringing the newly-made widow back to consciousness.

"When did you last see your father alive?" questioned Hal, in a subdued voice, for he felt awed in the presence of this terrible grief.

"Yesterday afternoon," came huskily from stony-eyed Iza. "He left us to go into the woods. There being no food for us, he went in search of fruit and roots. When he did not come back, we thought that perhaps he had fled into the long grass to join General Gomez, though we wondered at his not telling us before starting. We never dreamed that my poor father was swinging lifeless from a tree so near us."

And Iza broke down in a fit of sobbing that mercifully came to her relief.

Suddenly she sprang to her feet, her eyes flashing with hate.

Drawing from the folds of her dress Hal's pistol, which she still had, she turned to glare at the prisoners.

"They did it!" she hissed. "I thank Heaven that I have the means for so prompt a vengeance!"

But Sergeant Brown caught lightly at her wrist, depriving her of the weapon.

"There's no need for you, miss, to do such work," he interjected, in a tone of compassionate respect. "There's men enough about."

Both women began to sob afresh, but Brown drew our hero away to whisper:

"Lieutenant, sir, these prisoners aren't entitled to the rights of war. They're murderers clear enough. We could take them to General G., but then again we might have a fight on the way and lose

'em. Now, under the circumstances, sir, what do you think we ought to do?"

Hal looked into his subordinate's steady blue eyes, read the thought expressed there, and nodded.

"I reckon, sergeant, you're right."

Iza and her mother were induced to go back to the cabin, after they had been promised that the body of that husband and father should be cut down and properly buried.

Six wringing, groveling, protesting Spaniards were put upon their trial. It lasted but two minutes.

Soon after Iza's father had been buried, following the husky reading of a service from the well-thumbed prayer book in Sergeant Jim's kit, six Spaniards dangled from the ends of short lengths of halter.

To the coat of each foul pendulum was pinned a placard bearing this legend:

"Spanish Murderers, Hung by Uncle Sam's Soldiers!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE CHALLENGE.

"Sergeant, detail two men to ride two hundred yards ahead."

"Yes, sir."

"And two more to ride the same distance behind."

"Yes, sir."

"And let us push to General Gomez's camp with all speed."

"Yes, sir."

It was three hours later.

Command and horses having been well rested, our hero was now anxious to reach Cuban headquarters before dark.

Iza, her mother, and the starving children now had food in plenty for two or three days, as soon as they should sufficiently recover from their grief to be hungry.

Learning of the utter absence of food at the little cabin, Uncle Sam's soldiers had stepped forward to the last man, insisting that these Cubans should have their entire day's rations.

Hal's command was now on the march back, and a rapid march it was, the horses being kept most of the time at a brisk trot.

"Lieutenant, sir," began Brown, rid-

g alongside, after detailing the advance and rear guards, "the boys brought along with them an American flag. It was one that was given to them at General G.'s headquarters. They would like your permission to unfurl it and ride under it. They're just hungry for a sight of Old Glory."

"They couldn't get my permission not to unfurl it," replied Hal, so promptly that Sergeant Jim's face fairly beamed.

As the glorious bunting shook to the breeze, our hero rode to the side of the road, lifting his sombrero in salute.

"Hurrah!" yelled the troopers. "Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"Careful, men," admonished Hal, quietly. "We're not in Cuba on a fighting mission, you must remember. It will be wisest not to shout too much until we are out of the woods."

After that there was silence in the ranks, though many an earnest, loving look was bent upon the Stars and Stripes.

With two halts, they had made ten miles, Sergeant Brown, who had learned the way while riding over it earlier in the day, serving as guide.

It was during the second one of these halts that one of the advance guard rode back at a furious gallop.

"Lieutenant," he reported, "there are Spanish cavalry ahead."

"What?" cried Hal. "They have dared, then, to venture within twenty miles of General Gomez's camp?"

"They are here, sir, on the road ahead. Private Allston, sir, has waited to watch their approach a minute longer. Then he'll ride in, sir, to report."

Swiftly enough Hal ordered every man to horse. Fortunately Brown had brought along an extra beast, so that our hero was also mounted.

A minute went by, but Private Allston did not ride in.

Hal began to look worried.

"I won't leave one of the boys to meet alone," he muttered to Sergeant Brown. "Unless we soon hear the step of his horse we'll start after Allston."

"He's a pretty good man, sir, in my opinion, and able to look after himself. So far, sir, we've heard no shot."

"When we do it will be too late. I'll

take the first eight men and ride forward."

But just at that instant the pit-pat of hoofs was heard ahead.

Private Allston cantered into sight, side by side with a man in the uniform of Spain's riders.

"Got a prisoner — yes sirree!" chuckled Sergeant Jim.

"Hardly," disputed Hal. "It's a Spanish sergeant, and he's carrying a white handkerchief fastened to his sword point."

"Flag of truce from the enemy, sir, I think," reported Private Allston, riding up and saluting.

"What does he want?"

"Can't make it out, sir; I'm no Spanish lingoist."

"What is it, sir?" hailed Hal, acknowledging the Spaniard's salute.

That bronzed trooper spoke in Spanish, our hero listening attentively.

"Senor, on the road ahead of you are a body of Spanish horse. Our scouts warned us that you were coming. We have heard of you, and as famous fighters."

Smiling grimly, Hal bowed.

"We are tired of fighting the Cubans, who dodge into the thick jungle as soon as we open fire upon them," went on the Spanish sergeant, plaintively. "We long to fight with real soldiers. You Yankees have bragged so much about your soldiers that we of Spain desire to test your mettle. My captain has therefore sent me ahead, under a flag of truce, to bring you his challenge. At the same time, he begs that you will not skulk into the bush, as the Cubans do, and hide so deep in the woods that we cannot find you."

"Did your captain say that?" questioned Hal, hotly.

"I am delivering to you his very words. He hopes that, in the fight that is about to come off, you will not show us your backs, and then nothing, as the Cubans do."

"If your captain said that," retorted Hal, coldly, "he lies. I fought with the Cubans before I entered the United States Army. I am ready to bear witness that the Cubans are brave as any fighters

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in the world. I will support my opinion, tell your captain, at the point of my sword."

"Then you accept our challenge?" demanded the Spanish sergeant, eagerly.

"It is accepted with defiance."

"And you will ride at us in the open?—not fight as the Cubans do?"

"You speak of your captain? You have a company of men, then?"

"Very nearly," rejoined the sergeant, a peculiar gleam showing in his crafty eyes.

Hal noticed that look, was not deceived by the fellow's words.

"Take back my answer to your captain, sergeant. We will try to give him all the fight he desires. But tell him that I will not allow him to dictate the conditions of the battle."

"Ah!" cried the sergeant, contemptuously. "Then you are cowards. The flag you serve is but a bit of carven's bunting."

In a jiffy Lieutenant Hal's face became crimson.

"You are protected by your flag of truce, sergeant. But ride back and let the fight begin. Remember that I shall seek you. For your disrespectful words about our flag I pledge myself to drive the point of my sabre through your heart!"

The sergeant saluted insolently. Hal returned the gesture with one full of grace, out of respect not to the enemy but to his own manly dignity.

All hands watched the fellow canter out of sight back down the road.

"My men," said Hal, quietly, "I want none of you to give that sergeant so much as a scratch when we come together. Even if I do not at once ride at him, remember that he is reserved for me. If I do not kill him, I shall not come alive out of to-day's fight."

From the ranks came a murmur of deep approval. These men were led by a lieutenant whom they loved—whom they would follow into the jaws of death.

Though they hardly guessed it, those jaws now yearned for them.

"Sergeant," called Hal, beckoning to his next in command. "And you, too, Corporal Camden."

As the two non-commissioned officers rode up to him, Hal whispered:

"Sergeant, take six men and ride at once into the woods on our right flank. Corporal, take four men and ride into the woods on our left. Once you are detached, use your own discretion, but remember that we must win this fight or go down to the last man."

Hastily the two non-coms. saluted, next picked out their men and departed.

"By twos, forward march," ordered Maynard, leading his remaining command down the road.

A few moments later he gave the order to trot.

With carbines unslung, revolvers handy for instant grasp, and sabre hilts where a second's work would bare those blades, the Yankee troopers trotted ahead.

Rounding a turn in the road, Hal Maynard caught a distant view of some sixty Spanish horsemen drawn up in solid ranks.

Throwing his men in open order, the young lieutenant commanded his troopers to begin firing.

Four or five of the Spaniards went down at long range.

A return volley did no further damage than to pink the lobe of one of Hal's ears.

Crash! bang! Two volleys came out of the woods on either side.

The Spanish captain, after desiring an open fight, had deliberately put some of his force in ambush!

It was through suspicion of this plan that Maynard had weakened his own force by sending the sergeant and corporal into the woods.

Both of those valiant non-coms. now justified the trust placed in them.

One of Hal's men fell, shot dead from ambush.

Hardly had the volley died away than both Brown and Camden began banging away at both ambush parties from the rear.

"Remember the Maine!"

"Soak 'em, boys!"

A terrible, deadly fire it was that the flanking American squads now poured into the Spanish ambushers.

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Leaping to their feet, not waiting for their horses, those Spaniards who survived made a break for the road.

They reached it at a point between their own side and Hal's men.

And they struck the road, too, just in time to get between the cross fire of Americans and Spanish.

Hal's soldiers were thus protected from a brisk fire by the fugitive ambushers.

Assailed thus on all four side, the ambushers dwindled swiftly from thirty men to half a dozen.

Screaming in their terror, these few survivors fled toward their own comrades in saddle, the Spanish captain discovering who they were just in time to avoid wiping out the last one of them.

It was a blunder—a terrible one, such as no American commander would have been guilty of.

Coming in pursuit of the fleeing ambushers, Sergeant Brown and Corporal Camden reached the road at almost the same instant.

Reforming his reunited command, Hal gave, swift as thought, these two succeeding orders:

"Gallop! Charge!"

And then, as his men rode down upon the enemy, came the next stirring order: "Fire at will!"

Tempestuous as the crackling volleys were, they were almost drowned out by the ringing hurrahs of Uncle Sam's troopers.

But the Spanish were firing, too.

One of Hal's troopers fell dead. Another toppled out of saddle, badly wounded. Three or four received slight wounds that did not prevent them from riding on.

Of a sudden, Hal's teeth clicked together. Spurring his horse at its best speed, he outstripped his troopers.

He had caught sight, in the front ranks of the enemy, of the sergeant whom he had promised to kill!

Third Part.

CHAPTER VIII.

DEFENDING THE STARS AND STRIPES.

It was deadly work that preceded the clash of the two bodies of cavalry.

Under the deadly fire exchanged, another of Hal's men dropped out of the saddle dead, while two fell wounded.

But the Spanish loss was far worse.

It was not for nothing that fully one-half of Maynard's troopers wore on their collars the badges of sharpshooters!

An instant before the impact came Hal's stirring order:

"Draw sabres!"

Spain's men, too, were ready, steel in hand.

Clash! clang! clash!

Sparks flew from the crossed blades as enemies rode their horses at each other, each trying to crowd the foe into retreat.

Straight at the captain rode Hal.

As their swords met, the captain struck down out hero's sword.

But that was where Maynard's campaigning with the Cubans came into play.

One of the most dreaded of Cuban machete strokes is delivered under such circumstances.

Having struck down Hal's blade, the Spaniard carried his own back to guard.

Hal's own blade flew up, but not to meet the foe's.

Instead, he delivered an upward, slashing blow that ripped open the enemy's abdomen.

Continuing upward as if it had not dallied on the way, Maynard's sharp, crimsoned blade clashed against the Spaniard's.

That officer, losing his sabre, reeled from the saddle. He was not dead, but he was effectively out of the fight.

"Now for you, sir," cried Hal, turning around upon the sergeant who had insulted the Stars and Stripes.

Apparently nothing loath for the combat, the sergeant rode to meet him.

One of Hal's own men was in the way, but that well-disciplined trooper, remembering the lieutenant's orders, hurriedly backed his horse out of the way.

Clash! Hal struck down the sergeant's blade, confident that the fellow did not know how to deliver the upward machete stroke.

Nor was he deceived, but the sergeant, who had witnessed his captain's defeat, did not give our hero any chance to repeat the same method of fighting.

So anxious was the fellow, in fact, to avoid striking down our hero's sabre that the latter had abundant opportunities to lay his adversary's head open.

But this would not answer. Having promised to drive the point of his steel into the other's heart, nothing less would satisfy the American.

A clever feint, a swift stroke, a deft turn of the wrist, and the Spaniard was outplayed.

The coast was clear.

Hal made a rapid lunge, burying five inches of steel in the heart of the sergeant.

A groan that was hardly more than a gasp came from the man, who was dead a second later.

"Car-r-r-r-ramba, you Yankee pig!"

A Spanish trooper who was within two feet of Hal turned upon our hero the muzzle of his smoking pistol.

Crack! It was Sergeant Brown who fired first—a left-handed shot, but one that stretched Hal's would-be slayer in the dust.

Several moments of terrific fighting, in which Spain's soldiers did most of the taking, just as Uncle Sam's men accomplished most of the giving, demoralized the enemy.

Wheeling their horses about, they fled—fled before what had been a quarter of their number.

It was rout, complete and utter, for now not one of the foe turned to fire a shot at the pursuers.

"Quarter to all who halt and surrender!" shouted Hal, heading the chase.

But not one Spaniard availed himself of the offer.

Unable to stand before the Americans, they still preferred being shot through the back to calling out for amnesty.

It was a thrilling spectacle of its kind.

Unable to face their lesser but superior foe, these little brown fellows preferred

what was military suicide to the greater disgrace, as they regarded it, of surrendering to the hated Yankee soldiers.

For a mile the chase kept up. The troop that had started in ninety strands was now reduced to a few over a score.

All along the road lay bodies, few of them belonging to wounded men, for Uncle Sam's troopers had done their work too well to leave many of the Spaniards alive.

Suddenly a cheer, hoarse and broken, came from the throats of the foremost fugitives.

Ahead of them, not more than a mile away, appeared the head of a marching column of Spanish infantry.

As far back as the eye could see appeared the wavering, bobbing lines of rifles.

Hal gave a gasp of dismay.

Though he had valiantly attacked, and gloriously defeated more than four times his number, he was not prepared to attack a regiment of the enemy.

"Halt!" he commanded. Then, to Brown:

"Sergeant, we can't attack that force. There's no disgrace in running. Besides, we've left behind at least three wounded comrades. First back to get them—then honest, frank retreat."

Brown nodded, but without waiting for this sign of approval, our hero had given the order that wheeled his little detachment about, sending them over the road at a canter.

The three wounded men were found, and helped into the saddle.

Nor were the two dead comrades left by the roadside. They were lifted across the pommels of the saddles.

"Jupiter!" thrilled Hal, as the last of these bodies was picked up and hung over a horse's back with head and heels pointing toward the ground.

Maynard's quick ears had heard the trampling of horses' hoofs.

"They're rushing more cavalry to the front, confound 'em!" muttered the young lieutenant.

"We can handle 'em, maybe," was Sergeant Brown's dubious comment.

"Perhaps," retorted Hal. "But while we are engaged with the cavalry the i

fantry will come up. That will mean extermination."

"It looks like it, anyway, sir," was Sergeant Jim's cool answer. "If the enemy's horses are fresher than ours they'll soon overhaul us. Moving on the double quick, it doesn't take infantry long to come after cavalry."

Clearly it was either stand and fight to the last, or submit to being shot down during pursuit.

Hal's eye roved swiftly about over the landscape, seeking some strategic advantage.

"That hill to the left," he gritted. "It seems to offer us our best chance."

Sergeant Jim nodded. In a twinkling the squad was wheeled, and galloping toward it.

As they neared the top of the hill, the pursuing cavalry, to the number of fifty, came in sight.

"There they go, the running Yankee pigs!" roared a voice.

Hal translated the remark to Brown, who rode at his side, adding:

"It seems to make very little difference to those valiant gentlemen that we are fresh from having whipped a greatly superior force of their kind. Say! Eh? Jupiter!"

Hal gave a cry of delight as they gained the top of the hill.

It seemed like a retreat planned by Nature for this last, desperate defense.

The top of the hill was concaved, and deeply, too.

About three rods in diameter, and almost circular, was this natural basin.

It was deep enough, at the centre, to shelter the horses from any possible point of vantage that could be gained by marksmen in the surrounding country.

With a cheer, the fagged Americans galloped over into the basin.

An answering yell came from the cavalry of the enemy, now charging up the side of the hill.

Pausing only to dismount, Hal's troopers ran back to the top of the basin.

Throwing themselves flat at the edge, so that only the upper two inches of their heads showed, Uncle Sam's men took quick aim and fired.

Half a dozen of the Spaniards dropped simultaneously.

At their leader Hal had aimed, and now had the satisfaction of seeing that officer fall from saddle and lie still under the trampling hoofs of riderless horses.

Another volley did more disastrous work among the enemy, while the latter were still more than a hundred yards from the hill-top.

It was more than human nature—Spanish human nature—could stand.

The third volley was poured into the enemy's ranks just as they wheeled irregularly in flight.

"We can make a good stand here, sir, with such sharpshooters as we've got," ventured Sergeant Brown, saluting and showing a grinning visage.

"Yes," clicked Hal. "Sergeant, at once investigate and report to me the number of rounds of ammunition."

"Yes, sir."

Each trooper hastily counted the cartridges in his ammunition bet.

Sergeant Jim wrote down the figures, quickly casting up the column and striking an average.

The sergeant's honest, ruddy face showed a little concern as he reported:

"Lieutenant, I've got the figures."

"How many rounds?"

"Thirty cartridges to a man."

Hal's face lengthened.

"That's even worse than I had supposed," he muttered, uneasily. "It would be enough, if we had but eighty or ninety men to meet, but there's a regiment forming to come against us."

As Hal spoke, he pointed with his sabre to the country below.

Through the trees the Spanish infantry could be seen marching into position for battle.

Three battalions there were, and moving toward three different points of attack.

"It's tough," sighed Sergeant Jim, "but half of the boys here with us, sir, have lived through more than one last stand, as we thought, in the Indian country."

"Where's that flag?" demanded Hal.

In response to his question the soldier who had been carrying it now ran back

to get the pole and bunting, which he had lashed to the trappings of his saddle.

Unfurling it, our hero planted it firmly at the top of the basin.

Its beautiful folds flew out to the breeze, an inspiring sight even to men about to die.

"Men," spoke Hal, briskly, "we'll call this place Fort Yankee. With less than one shot apiece for the enemy, we may as well make up our minds to die defending the Stars and Stripes!"

CHAPTER IX.

DEATH AROUND FORT YANKEE.

"Oh, say, do you see,
By the dawn's early light——"

Strong and sturdy the song rolled out. Started by two or three of the troopers, the volume swelled as every throat gave forth lusty sounds.

Lieutenant Hal was satisfied. Men who could go singing into what they knew to be their last battle, could be depended upon.

"Make every shot tell, boys," he muttered, passing along at the rear of the waiting troopers. "Aim only at the men in the front ranks. Show them that it is death to be in the lead of the charge."

Hal's heart swelled with pride in the manly fellows when he saw that not a hand trembled.

Each carbine would be aimed true, every bullet would find its mark!

Below the battalions manœuvred into position for the attack.

Each one of the three was to charge separately on three different sides at once.

Spain's troops had halted for a moment. The little brown fellows were fixing bayonets.

"It'll be cold steel, an lots of it—if we let the pesky varmints get near enough," grimaced Sergeant Jim.

Forward! The word had been given below. Onward, upward, as steadily as if on parade, the battalions advanced.

It was to be little more than a parade—so the Spanish officers reckoned!

True, the Yankees might, in their desperation, attempt a little faint-hearted

resistance. But that a score of men would seriously try to resist three battalions of Spain's regulars—bah! the very thought made the regiment's officers grin.

"Remember the Maine!"

It was Sergeant Jim's voice, low and steady, that sent that message around the little basin.

"And also," came from Hal, "remember Bunker Hill!"

The mention of patriotic old Boston's glorious fight thrilled the waiting troopers.

The farmers on Bunker Hill had waited patiently for the order to fire. Uncle Sam's regulars would be not less patient.

Nearer came the marching battalions. As yet the order to charge had not issued.

What were the Yankees doing? Were they ready to lie down and die under Spain's bayonets?

The silence up above caused the smiles in the Spanish ranks to deepen.

It was only a parade, then, after all!

Of a sudden that notion changed. Over the edge of the basin came the muzzles of less than a score of rifles.

There would be some scratches, then, for Spain?

But the smile hardly died out of Spanish faces.

"All ready, boys!"

Hal's steady voice did not reach the enemy, a hundred yards away, but his troopers heard.

"Fire."

A series of subdued shots rang out from the hill's top.

The noise was hardly greater than made by the setting off of a pack of fire-crackers—but the results?

Spanish soldiers began dropping in the ranks as if by magic, for each Yankee soldier had five shots in his magazine, and could fire them all in fifteen seconds.

"Charge!"

The Spanish officers gave that order to prevent the attack of nervousness with which the battalions seemed threatened.

It came too late.

Hal's order to pick off only the enemy in the front ranks bore splendid fruit.

Those in the lead became demoralized. Turning, and crowding back upon

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those who came behind, the panic was communicated to all.

Despite the hoarse orders of their officers, the Spaniards fled—fled in fairly good order, but nevertheless it was retreat.

They left some seventy fallen comrades behind!

Few American bullets had been wasted.

"Boys," thrilled Hal, "keep up that splendid work, and who knows but we may win yet?"

"We'll do it, sir" came back the steady answer.

"While the cartridges hold out," voiced Sergeant Jim.

"And then," added Hal, "we'll die, boys, in making the best charge with sabres that we know how to do!"

"Hurrah!" came the deep-throated yell.

The cheer was heard below, causing Spain's officers to gnash their teeth.

Did those accursed Yankees up yonder imagine that Spain's veterans were already whipped?

After only a bare breathing spell, the battalions were reformed.

Again the order was given to go forward—upward.

Hal's doughty troopers, with magazines refilled, awaited the next order.

Confident of their marksmanship, these men in blue would have preferred to fire at longer range.

But Hal, who was considering also the moral effect upon the enemy, waited until the foe was at the same distance as before.

"Fire!"

Again the magazine rifles spoke—talked fast and straight!

This time the enemy was prepared. At the first shot from the hill top one company of each battalion spread out in skirmish order. Spain returned the fire, sending a storm of bullets over the natural basin.

"Bless their little hearts—they can't shoot a little bit!" chuckled Sergeant Jim, as, after emptying his magazine, he took a second's peer at the enemy.

But the Spaniards had suffered again as badly as before, with this difference,

that now, with their officers behind them, they continued their charge.

Each trooper slipped in a fresh clip of cartridges. Without intermission the banging began again.

By the time that their magazines were empty, the Spanish were once more in retreat.

And now Spain's loss was close to two hundred men.

"Well done!" cried Hal.

Yet his face grew long in spite of himself.

Despite the Spanish loss there were at least a thousand of the enemy left.

On the other hand, half of the ammunition with which the Americans entered the battle was gone.

A quarter of a mile away the Spaniards were halting to reform.

Badly as they had been punished, the officers of the enemy realized that the battle could not end there.

To accept defeat from a bare score of Yankee marksmen would be a disgrace worse than death.

Yet minute after minute slipped by without any new signs of battle.

Hal's men enjoyed that rest to the full.

Leaving their rifles, freshly loaded, standing against the natural earthworks, they walked about, working the cramp out of their limbs.

But Hal and Sergeant Jim remained vigilant, never removing their gaze from the foe.

"Well, by thunder!" ejaculated Brown. "The Spanish like what they've got so well that they're going to try again."

It was true. The troops below were in motion.

But it was all manœuvring, as yet. The Spanish companies were marching to their new positions.

"They're going to give us a harder nut to crack," smiled Hal, grimly.

"Right, sir. They're coming in open skirmish order this time."

"Which will make them, perhaps, a little harder to hit."

"And they're going to form a cordon, sir. We've got to defend on all sides."

Silently, with the unconcern of men

"CLIF FARADAY UNDER FIRE." READ TRUE BLUE.

who have made up their minds to die, the troopers slipped back to their places.

Once more they picked up the carbines which had stood them in such good stead that morning.

Hal looked on, satisfied. There was not yet a single shaking hand on gun barrel or at trigger.

Whenever the troopers peered over the natural redoubt, they saw the bodies of those they had slain on the two former charges.

That cheered them. When the end came, they could feel that they had sent ten or fifteen times their own number ahead of them to destruction.

Over their heads swept the skirmish fire of the enemy.

Most of the bullets went too high. Not a few struck the ground outside.

Though the Americans did not show themselves unnecessarily, yet when they did peer over not a head suffered in consequence.

As the skirmish lines came nearer, our hero expected to see the enemy run to close formation for a charge.

Nothing of the sort took place, however. The skirmish line came on slowly but undauntedly.

"Fire!"

As the order rang out the American carbines cracked in unison.

At that short range more magnificent work was done.

Yet the Spaniards came grimly on. Had not their officers told them that they must either put the Yankees to the bayonet or be too disgraced ever to see Spain again?

Therefore, despite their losses, the enemy continued to advance.

It was necessary to slip in the second clip of cartridges.

Not even these five volleys, however, stayed the enemy.

Hal, watching through the smoke, felt that the end was near.

Once the Spaniards reached the redoubt, once they got within striking distance with their bayonets, the result must be swift and certain.

Hal gave the order to slip in the third clip of cartridges.

Almost immediately the firing rebegan.

Never was more magnificent shooting seen.

It told heavily on the pluck of the little brown men.

They wavered. The last few shots told on their nerves. Retreat began once more.

As they fired the last cartridges into the backs of the foe, Lieutenant Hal's men rose and cheered lustily.

But their joy was of short duration. A moment later the news ran around the little group:

"Our last cartridge is gone!"

The last, of a certainty, though never had better work been done with so little ammunition, for Spain's total loss in the three assaults was near three hundred and fifty men and officers.

"Boys," said Hal, turning around upon his men in blue, "our next move must be the climax. If they charge again, at the right instant we will ride down the hill, trying to cut our way through their weakest point."

It was all there remained to do.

Yet in this plan there was no hope of victory—not even of life itself!

CHAPTER X.

THE MILITARY CLIMAX.

For twenty minutes there was no further move among the thrice repulsed Spaniards.

That third of an hour was devoted to resting their men, to attending to the wounds of some who had received minor hurts.

At last the bugle calls sounded.

"Their sand isn't all gone," muttered Hal, noting the alacrity with which the foe sprang to obey their orders.

He saw also a change of tactics.

Finding that on their last charge the cordon of skirmishers had been as easily defeated as the two former formations the Spaniards now concentrated their men for a charge in three parallel battalions.

"It's the bayonet this time, sure," divined Lieutenant Hal.

He was right. Up the hill came the enemy, in fairly compact masses, at

with bayonets fixed for an assault by steel.

"Cover them with your guns," ordered Hal. "Let them think you are merely waiting to repeat your former marksmanship: That will make the rascals at least apprehensive. But be alert for the order to horse. When we start, we must do it so suddenly that the enemy will hardly have time to understand that we have changed our tactics at close quarters."

He spoke as simply as if merely conversing on minor matters.

His men answered with nods, still keeping their eyes on the enemy, their carbines as much in evidence as if they expected every instant to use them.

"Sergeant."

"Yes, sir."

"Slip back to the horses. Be ready to see that, when the order comes, the men are ready to mount without confusion."

"Yes, sir."

"In the charge, I will ride on the right, you on the left."

"Yes, sir."

Drawing his sabre, Hal stood leaning on it, watchful of every foot the enemy progressed.

"Still marching," he murmured. "When will the charge be ordered?"

He kept his eyes on the Spanish colonel.

He now saw that officer call a trumpeter to him.

"Thirty seconds more, and they'll be charging," thrilled the boy. "Our moment has come!"

The moment for the splendid dash—the rush to certain death!

In a clear, ringing voice he gave the order.

Rising, Uncle Sam's troopers made a concerted rush for their horses.

They were in saddle—forward—riding over the top!

With a wild hurrah they swept down the hill.

Hal looked in the direction of the sun, shining brightly—the last day of sunlight he would see.

"I'm glad Juan didn't come," he murmured between his hard-set teeth. "He will live to do better work than this!"

In what he believed to be his last

moments he had time to think of his comrade.

Time to think of something else, too—the grand old American flag which now waved over his head.

For Hal, in his rush, hardly knowing what he did, had snatched up the flag that had floated for an hour over Fort Yankee.

He bore it aloft, now flaunting it with his left hand, while in his right he carried his sabre.

His horse, trained cavalry beast, went without guidance, the bridle hanging idly on its neck.

Seeing the start of the cavalry rush, not knowing what to make of such an unexpected move, the Spanish battalions had halted, to be the better able to receive the charge.

"Viva Cuba libre!"

"Viva los Estados Unidos!"

Bang! crash! smash! and the engagement had begun in another direction.

From the nearest woods, in open order, firing as they ran, issued a force of some two hundred Cuban infantry.

Never had support been more welcome.

Two of the Spanish battalions were immediately wheeled to receive the new attack.

This left Hal and his handful of troopers still to face a battalion of the enemy's infantry.

Both Cuban and American forces, now in the open, seemed destined to extermination.

But the American troopers rode on with the lighter hearts that a sense of more comradeship brings.

With the help of the Cubans, the regiment might be cut down by one-half before the sharp quarter of an hour's work should be over.

At the rear of the Spaniards came another sharp crackle of infantry fire.

Bringing his men to about face, Hal led them back fifty yards out of the scrimmage, to avoid having them cut down by the cross fire of his unexpected Cuban allies.

As he did so, the earth shook as if with thunder.

Cavalry were riding to the rescue. On the way the Cuban horsemen stopped

"Remember the Maine!" Read True Blue, the New Naval Weekly.

long enough to pay their respects to the half company of Spanish cavalry, which had been kept at the rear during the attacks on Fort Yankee.

Then onward swept the Cuban cavalry, three hundred strong.

Swift demoralization showed itself in the Spanish ranks.

As soon as he saw that he could join in the engagement without bringing his men under Cuban cross-fire, Lieutenant Maynard gave the order.

It was a race between Uncle Sam and Cuba libre to see which could be the first to reach the Spanish hollow square that had now formed to repulse the combined assault.

It finished in a dead heat, Cubans riding into the open formation of Hal's troopers, and fighting side by side.

The line was soon broken. Spanish rout was threatened.

In the melee of clashing steel that followed, Hal, leaning forward over his horse's neck, found himself engaged in sword play with a Spanish captain.

For a few moments it was give and take, but at last our hero found the chance for which he had waited.

His guard knocked down, he threw up his sabre blade, disemboweling the Spaniard with the stroke he had learned among the Cubans.

"Look out, mi amigo!" rang a shrill voice.

It was Juan Ramirez who had called.

Turning swiftly, Hal Maynard saw a flash of steel over his head.

The Spanish colonel, also mounted, had ridden at our hero while the latter was still engaged with the captain.

Now he swung his blade aloft, ready to bring it down before the American could wheel about and come up to guard.

Hal's head was in danger. The blow, if delivered, would split his skull.

A Ramirez to the rescue!

Yet there was not time for Juan, either, to interpose a guard of steel.

Urging his horse forward at a long bound, the devoted little Cuban offered his own life to save his friend's.

Leaping from saddle as they came together, Juan sprang into Hal's saddle,

catching the American by the shoulders and interposing his own curly head.

Brave Juan!

He faced death smilingly, and death fled!

For another horseman, riding superbly, saw the same danger. He spurred forward in the nick of time.

A machete flashed, sunk deep in the muscles of the Spanish colonel's sword arm.

A splendid stroke!

Down came the Spanish sword across Juan's shoulders; but, robbed of its forces, it merely fell, glancing to the ground.

The next blow with that terrible machete half severed the colonel's head from his shoulders.

"They run!"

This triumphant yell from the Cubans, mingling with that despairing wail from the beaten Spaniards:

"Save who can!"

But who could be saved?

"Al machete!" was the battle cry that sent the Cubans in hot pursuit.

Spanish blood dyed the grass. In the little hollows of the ground it formed deep pools.

A disorganized rabble fled down the hillside, disappeared under the trees of the forest, only to be followed and put to the avenging sword.

Hal's men did not follow.

They had done their share. Now the dismounted, resting themselves and their beasts.

Though a few showed scratches or cuts from the late encounter, every trooper who had ridden from Fort Yankee was alive to tell the tale—alive and ready for more campaigning!

Hal had quickly dismounted, to throw his arms, Cuban fashion, around Juan.

"Thank Heaven that a brave young officer is saved both to Cuba and the United States!" pronounced a grave voice.

Looking up, both saw who their rescuer was.

"General Gomez!" uttered Hal.

"Yes," was the half laughing answer. "Did you believe the Spanish liars who

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say I am too old to take the field? Well, you have seen to the contrary."

To the contrary, indeed. Though Gomez had ridden twenty miles that morning, finishing up with a hard charge, he was still as fresh as the youngest, strongest officer in his service.

"General," cried Hal, saluting, "if you had not arrived as you did, the last American soldier in Cuba would have been wiped out."

"From what I have seen on the hill slope," smiled the Cuban generalissimo, "you would have taken to the next world with you enough Spaniards to have made crowded company. Your troopers must have killed three hundred of the enemy."

"Three hundred and fifty, as well as we could judge, sir," answered Hal.

"But why that foolish charge against so numerous a foe? Did you know that we were in the neighborhood?"

"No, general, but our last cartridge was gone. We felt that it would be easier to die riding than lying on the ground."

And Hal briefly recited the history of that morning's work, while General Gomez and his staff, listening attentively, applauded as one man when the tale was finished.

"Lieutenant Maynard," commented the old general, simply, but with evident warmth, "I am sorry that you left the Cuban service. Had you stayed with us, and shown such dash as you have displayed this morning, I should have made you at least a colonel by this time."

"I am best off, general, where I am," was the respectful, earnest answer.

"How so, my lieutenant?"

"I am serving where every man should serve, general—under his own flag."

"It is true," assented Gomez. "My young friend, when my scouts brought

me at daylight news that this Spanish regiment was marching to the coast, I resolved to come out of camp in person and lead the attack. Your devoted comrade, Ramirez, insisted upon coming with me. He must have had a premonition that you would fall in with the regiment which you, unaided, did so much to annihilate. But make yourself comfortable here, Lieutenant Maynard, for it is here that I shall pitch my camp for to-day, and it is here that the rest of my troops will join me."

"I shall have one favor to ask you, general."

"It is granted now, before asking."

"Only a few rounds of cartridges for my men."

"They shall be yours—all you will accept."

General Gomez spoke as freely as if he had more cartridges than he could use, instead of being wofully short of them.

But then, he could refuse nothing to Hal Maynard and his Yankee troopers.

[THE END.]

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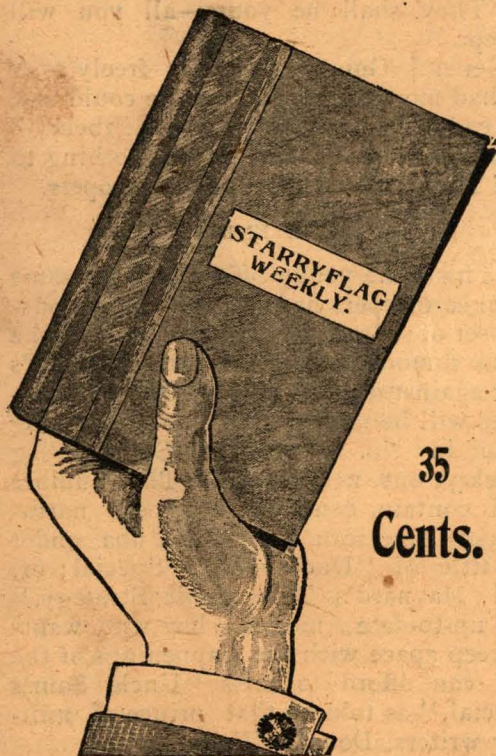
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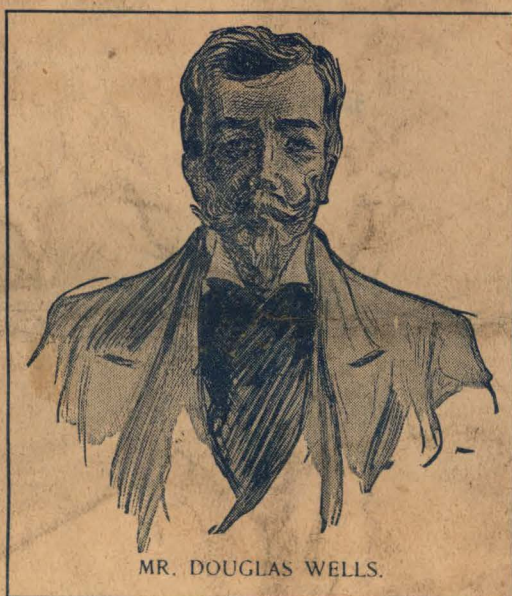
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